

Innovators Series

Emory University- Atlanta, Georgia

In 1993, Emory University faced a dilemma—how could it possibly accommodate a growing student and employee population without spending a fortune on additional parking and sacrificing valuable open space? After weighing the options, the school determined that providing commuter benefits to both students and employees would provide a long-term solution for less money. By establishing a comprehensive commuter benefits program, Emory saves money over the long term, provides a benefit that employees value, and is recognized as one the Best Workplaces for CommutersSM.

Creating a Commuter-Friendly Campus Environment

Located just outside downtown Atlanta, open space on Emory's campus is not just a hot commodity—it's a costly one. When trying to find solutions to its parking issues, Emory came across an astounding figure: based on internal analysis, constructing a single parking space could cost the university approximately \$10,000, plus thousands more annually in security and maintenance. The university was faced with a challenge—how could it deal with the increasing number of employees and students that need to commute to campus each day without giving up valuable land? Due to its urban location, Emory aims to use all available land to support the university's growth, and it hoped to limit the construction of new parking facilities as well as consider removing some existing parking spaces to create more land for other uses.

Weighing the high per-space price tag and the need to keep as much available land as possible open, decision makers at Emory University thought providing commuter benefits rather than spending the same money on parking made better business sense. Instead of building 1,500 individual parking spaces at a projected cost of \$15 million, the university found it could provide subsidized transit passes for its employees for more than 30 years at less expense. This plan effectively reduced the number of parking spaces needed and saved the university a substantial amount of money in construction and maintenance costs. Emory also avoided additional costs associated with running a shuttle to service the proposed parking facility—approximately \$100,000 per year per shuttle bus.

Designing a Comprehensive Package

In creating its commuter benefits program, Emory formed working committees and moved the proposed benefits through the university administration's approval process, ultimately designing a flexible program with a variety of commute options.

For more than 10 years, Emory has provided transit and vanpool subsidies to qualified employees. With an annual budget of approximately \$500,000, Emory's commuter benefits program is also able to offer a voluntary carpool program, free or discounted parking for carpools and vanpools, and bike racks for cyclists. In addition, Emory provides shuttle services (using electric buses) to the entire community. Emory's commuter benefits programs are funded by a

At-A-Glance

By avoiding the construction of new parking facilities, Emory saves more than \$10,000 per parking space avoided.

Employer: Emory University

Location: Atlanta, Georgia

BWC Since: 2001

Commuter Benefits:

Free bus passes

Vanpool pass subsidies

Preferred vanpool parking

Rideshare matching

Membership in a TMA

Telework

Compressed work schedules

Car sharing program

Electric bicycle recharging stations

variety of sources. The carpool, vanpool, bike, walk, and transit programs are subsidized by parking revenues received from the employees and visitors who park on campus. The employers in the Clifton Corridor of Atlanta, Emory's student government association, and the university's Residential Services department jointly subsidize the shuttle services.

The university's transportation department advertises its programs to employees year round but targets students at the beginning of each academic semester. These advertising efforts include distributing ridesharing flyers with parking passes, publishing advertisements both online and in the newspaper, and organizing recognition events for students and staff who get to campus without driving alone.

The expansiveness of Emory's commuter benefits program as well as the program's budget clearly illustrate the university's commitment to creating a commuter-friendly campus and providing outstanding benefits to its employees.

"It is very important that Emory explore all transportation options in order to relieve traffic congestion in the Clifton Corridor and to give employees choices in how they commute to work. If we aspire to be one of the Best Workplaces for Commuters, we must know what our employees expect in a good commuting experience and be ready to offer programs that meet their needs," said Bob Hascall, vice president for campus services at Emory University.

Continued Growth and Recognition

Employees and students have responded positively since the start of the university's program. In addition, Emory constantly encourages employees and students to take advantage of the commuting options offered to them, with 1,800 employees currently use the program. Participation figures from 2004 show that the program includes more than 1,000 transit users, nearly 500 carpoolers, 156 vanpoolers, and 49 participants in the bike/walk program.

Despite the fact that the program has been in existence for more than 10 years, the university community continues to be involved in transportation issues on campus. Faculty and student groups convene to offer guidance and make decisions regarding transportation and parking policies. The student government has also set up a task force to investigate transportation demand at the university, and has developed a carpool program specifically for students.

One of the Best Workplaces for Commuters since 2001, Emory sees this recognition as an additional opportunity to add legitimacy to its local commuter programs and provide a link to other transportation issues around the country. Emory's programs have also been recognized in the Atlanta area for their contribution to easing congestion and helping to improve air quality. The university has been recognized by Atlanta's Clean Air Campaign each year from 2000 through the present and has also been recognized by the Chronicle of Higher Education as a "Green Campus."

Emory's motivation for offering a comprehensive commuter benefits program was simple—reducing demand for parking and avoiding construction of new parking decks, being a good neighbor in the university community, helping with air quality issues, and providing a benefit that employees value. The university believes it made a wise decision to implement these benefits and has seen significant costs savings over the years. Not only has Emory seen significant savings by not building a new parking facility that would have been paid for over a 20-year period, the university also sees the positive environmental impact of its decision. Emory encourages other universities to consider as many commuter benefit options as they can reasonably implement. By providing employees with a wide variety of resources and options, they are more likely to find a commuting option that fits their particular lifestyle.